

Wycombe Wanderers 5, Clapton 1

WYCOMBE WANDERERS put years on their fans before claiming both points on Saturday. For the final result hides the truth and the warning as over 2,000 at Loakes Park really saw it.

Signs of strain were clear. For 45 minutes the Blues' shooting, passing, thinking and tackling showed little respect for the dire consequences a defeat might have had on their Isthmian League championship bid.

They wasted a vast percentage of the first half trailing lamely to a club deep in the League's basement zone.

And it took centre-back John Delaney to spark the attack with an equaliser.

Ironically really for it was the Wycombe skipper whose mistake accounted for Clapton's goal.

Whether through a sense of shame or embarrassment, or perhaps an interval pep talk from manager Brian Lee, Wycombe resumed back in business — which accounts for the 5-1.

But they can't hope to be so fortunate again. Had it been Sutton, St. Albans or any other top team, would there still have been a business left to come back for in the second half?

Remember Barking, who ended the Blues' unbeaten home by taking a 2-0 interval lead. Did they danced around in a daze? Wycombe hit back but failed to retrieve even a point on that occasion, losing 2-1.

Clapton weren't nearly as good as their East London neighbours. So Wycombe can safely breathe sighs of relief, recall their 22nd Isthmian win in 30 outings, and claim a "double" begun at the Spotted Dog last September.

The return of Keith Blunt off the casualty list marked only one of several changes in Wanderers' format from the Hendon affair. Out went goalkeeper Maskell and striker Horseman, the former with a thigh injury. 'Bodger' was rested after feeling below par during the week.

Instead Kevin O'Brien and Bernie Bremer (after a one-match absence) lined up at Loakes Park on Saturday. With them were Iain MacLean, rested due to Paul Fuschillo's continuing injury problems, and Geoff Anthony.

In far drier conditions than Tuesday's drenching, Anthony came into his own. Tipped by manager Lee before the season opened as the one to watch, Geoff finally made good, and did much to instigate a couple of goals for Keith Searle.

Clapton, beaten only once in their previous five outings, arrived in confident mood. Manager Pat Tarling warned Wycombe during the week: "My boys can get at least a point — they can even get two."

A rash statement perhaps, but admirable thinking. Indeed, on Wycombe's first half form, it seemed perfectly justified.

After six minutes, full back

By Mike Whitesman

Lowry gave the cutting through pass for Bull to emerge behind home defenders and shoot over the advancing O'Brien.

Delaney erred again when his weak back pass got stuck in the mud. Had centre forward McAllister punished it as it deserved. Clapton might well have led further after 13 minutes.

Altogether Wanderers spent 37 minutes in arrears, with loose uncontrolled shooting which, for the most part wouldn't have jeopardised a barn door.

Often off target, but trying hard, Bremer brought that bulldozer shot of his into play. Partridge reacted quickly, tipping a particularly dangerous 25 yard effort over for an early corner.

Wycombe's lack of urgency

and Clapton's swift offside snare soon caused a marked deterioration.

Meanwhile O'Brien turned in a generally safe performance, making some dazzling saves when necessary with his defence looking so suspect.

Eventually skipper Delaney made amends and woke his colleagues up with a 43 minute equaliser, rising head and shoulders above everyone to nod home Larry Pritchard's accurately flighted corner.

Delaney's second goal in two games came as timely as any of the 19 he has scored for the Blues this season.

It gave them new purpose and restored the urgency hitherto missing. Within six minutes of the second half kick off, Pritchard sent in a strong shot which had Partridge jumping at full stretch. At first the 'keeper seemed to have pushed the ball over the bar, but instead it dropped down inside the net.

Ahead at last, Wanderers did their best to forget earlier failings. Nine minutes later, Searle

deposited the third goal, set up by impressive teamwork with Anthony to the fore.

Hounsell limped off to be replaced by substitute Murray, and Clapton continued to swing each raid over to Kempton on the left wing. Yet their's was now a lost cause.

A long ball off the right from Anthony saw Searle control it before slotting home number four, 11 minutes from time.

Clapton yielded again in the last minute. Partridge again tried transferring a Pritchard shot over the bar. It didn't reach that far however, and Bremer headed Wycombe 5-1 up.

First half? What first half?

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: K. O'Brien; K. Blunt, I. MacLean, E. Powell, J. Delaney, I. Rundle, G. Anthony, B. Baker, K. Searle, L. Pritchard, B. Bremer. Sub: A. Horseman (not used).

CLAPTON: B. Partridge; R. Lowry, R. Murray, S. Shorey, J. Hounsell (Sub. J. Murray, 68 mins.), C. Watson, M. Bull, M. Dai, E. McAllister, J. Coleman, R. Kempton.

Referee: Mr. K. Bray (Norwich). Official paying attendance: 2,151.

Half-time: 1-1. Goalscorers: Wycombe — Delaney (43), Pritchard (51), Searle 2 (60, 79).



Bremer, on his own, watches his header pass the line for number five.